



## MARCH 2021 NEWS FROM SEI

*In recent months several student-led initiatives have sprung up at SEI. Here three students describe what's been happening: first year Lay Reader candidate Patricia Ellison (Diocese of Moray, Ross and Caithness) writes about Wednesday evening Compline; second year Mixed Mode ordinand Rachael Wright (Diocese of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane) describes the new online Prayer Space; and third year ordinand Lisa Curtice (Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway) outlines the Bravetalk initiative.*

### **'Surrounded as we are by so great a cloud of witnesses':**

**Wednesday Compline at SEI.** 'Because I am a newbie to SEI in this year of pandemic, I have not yet had the opportunity to meet together with all of my fellow students', writes *Pat Ellison*, shown right stirring pancake batter in her kitchen in *Forres on Shrove Tuesday*. 'Week by week I work with a small group online as together we wrestle with the course content in the various modules assigned to us. We have come to know each other, albeit two-dimensionally: the strong views, the exploration, the engagement and resistance and understanding as new and less new ideas are presented and examined - a learning process, with its joys and pitfalls.



'But at the end of the evening the experience is transformed.

Beamed in from various other electronic locations, we find ourselves all together, a more complete group – students and tutors, learners and leaders from other courses, a community of learning expressing its faith.

'This experience, this discipline, is moving and profound. It sets the learning with its rhythms and eccentricities – 'the race that is set before us' - within a wider formational framework, in which we are united both with one another and with those millions of others, departed, living and yet to come, in shared prayer; the tradition which reaches back to Old Testament times, reciting or chanting the psalms – 'evening, morning and at noon I will cry and lament'. The online assembly has a poignancy and beauty of anonymity – only the leader and responder are visible, the rest of us are there (where?) in attendance seemingly in name only, but powerfully networked in our reality as we share in prayer.

'Invariably I find my head is racing with random ideas as I tune in at the beginning – but the familiar words impose the discipline at once, as the liturgy itself takes over the work. As sisters and brothers together, we ask for a quiet night and a perfect end. It's a still point, a moment of inbreath, of mystery, as we pray together in community for rest in God's eternal changelessness.'

**Pat Ellison**

**Student Prayer:** 'There is a phrase which we use in our house to describe the importance of sometimes being the first person to be vulnerable in a conversation or relationship,' writes *Rachael Wright*. 'That is that you "give the gift of going second". It reminds us that although sharing something of yourself (in asking for help, offering a personal experience, or being emotionally open) can be scary, such courage usually enables others to respond similarly without the same fears. At the beginning of the academic year, one of my colleagues asked the student community for prayer via our shared WhatsApp group and thus gave everyone else the gift of going second in all the proceeding months.



‘That person set the tone for the kind of community we would become (for our community changes as students leave and arrive each year). Even though we are separated by distance, and more so than usual by restrictions, we share our sorrows and triumphs, showing our love and care for one another through the means available to us. Now, if you scroll back through this WhatsApp feed, as well as words of “Amen” and “Praying”, you’ll see little streams of emojis – hearts, hands, and faces that communicate so much more. They say, “We’re with you, you are not alone”; they say, “We trust God in this, though it seems insurmountable”; they say, “We are a family, in good and difficult times”. And they say it in amongst questions about lectures and essays, in between funny memes about church life, and around pictures of snow and garden produce. Studies and prayer happen in the midst of all manner of things.

‘I see this as an important part of our formation as a student community this year. Many of these prayer requests have been time-sensitive, and it is powerful to know that your friends are standing with you in a particular moment. Others have been things that, in ‘ordinary times’, we might have waited to share at a residential weekend, but Zoom weekends make that trickier so this has allowed us to be more involved in each other’s lives than we might have. Finally, it reminds us that we are united by the Holy Spirit, who, present in each of us, inspires us to prayer and intercedes on our behalf when we have no words, because, although we are separated, we are one body, united by the one Spirit.

‘So, thanks be to God for technology, and for the student who gave everyone else the gift of going second.’

**Rachael Wright**

### Casual chat led to Bravetalk

- *You mean to say, the students asked for another Zoom session to be added to the timetable?*
- *Well, to be fair, the idea predated the pandemic. It happened like this ...*
- *I do enjoy the sessions at the residentials AND the conversations you get into on a Saturday night, but I’m so tired by then. If only we could bring the two together and have some protected time when students could talk to each other outside of the individual sessions.*
- *I know what you mean. We have such a range of experiences between us. It would be good to be able to learn from each other and explore differences.*



Months later a formal proposal for a peer-learning session is agreed by the Student Chapter and warmly received by staff. A one-hour student-led discussion becomes part of the formal timetable for the Orientation Week and Residential Weekends. We seek input from the community on a title that would speak to what were about.

- *I think it’s about building deeper levels of trust, acknowledging our differences*
- *Allowing ourselves to show vulnerability*
- *Having honest, respectful conversations.*

Hence, ‘Bravetalk’, inspired by Mickey Scottbey Jones and her [‘Invitation to Brave Space’](#).

Come the autumn, we knew that we would not be meeting in person. Most new students will not have met any of the community face-to face. Some volunteers get together to plan the first session and a loose format emerges.

- *We need a light touch, humour*
- *Prayer to start and close*
- *An opportunity to check in safely with one other person*
- *Plenty of time for discussion in small groups*
- *A topic that everyone can engage with.*

Topics have been chosen for their relevance to formation – becoming known in the community and church (based on the film, ‘Godspeed’), self-care (stimulated by an interview with Carla Grosch-Miller) and spiritual practices (where students shared what sustains them).

Feedback has mentioned ‘safe space’, ‘important conversations’, ‘learning to be vulnerable’. In this pandemic year we are learning the true value of conversation as pastoral practice. **Dr Lisa Curtice**



### Acting Like a Christian: a five-part discussion series continues in Lent.

What does it mean to act like a Christian? What is characteristic of Christian behaviour?

Jesus says that everyone will know his disciples by their love. How are his disciples known in the twenty-first century by that criterion?

For Monday evenings in Lent, a five-part series hosted by the Scottish Episcopal Institute will consider these questions in order to articulate principles to guide Christian behaviour, to identify what place such principles have in the public square, and to develop some facility to apply such principles to contemporary ethical questions.

Monday 1 March, 7pm–8pm, the second of the five evenings, will consider how a Christian understanding of love is critiqued today with a discussion about love and justice vis-à-vis a woman caught in adultery (John 8.3–11).

Monday 8 March: How is love to guide Christian behaviour (Titus 2.11–15)?

Monday 15 March: Does ‘Christian ethics’ have a place in the public square (I Peter 2.11–15)?

Monday 22 March: How may Christian principles be applied today (James 1.22–25)?

The discussion will be facilitated by the Revd Dr Michael Hull, SEI’s Director of Studies, and delivered via Zoom. The link and password will be emailed on the morning of each of the five Mondays.

Michael may be contacted at [dos@scotland.anglican.org](mailto:dos@scotland.anglican.org)

For more, and to register, click [here](#).

*This edition of the Newsletter sees the start of a series of features entitled 'A day in the life of ...'. Members of SEI staff and the Provincial Director of Ordinands will offer a light-hearted account of what a typical day at work comprises for each of them. The series begins with the Principal.*

Wednesday 3rd February began as always with Morning Office from *Daily Prayer*. Members of SEI follow a [cycle](#) which lists people associated with the Institute, and so my prayers were especially for the student named that day, followed by sending her an email detailing that special intention. Having thus logged on, I attempted to tackle the overnight accumulation of emails; how *do* they multiply so speedily? This new crop, however, included two very welcome communications about the 2021-22 session: from a Rector agreeing to host a Final Year student during her 'long' congregational placement, and from someone else agreeing to serve as a student's Diocesan Advisor.



9am saw me joining in a Zoom meeting chaired by John Stuart, Secretary General. This monthly gathering enables members of the GSO Management Team to share details of their past month's workload, catch up on each other's well-being and that of the staff for whom each has responsibility, and reflect upon upcoming business. SEI is an integral part of the GSO structure, symbolised by its offices being based in Forbes House as by participation in this meeting. As ever, it was good to be there to listen to colleagues and share encouragements, stresses, plans and ideas.

The rest of the morning was spent in forward-planning for the community-gathering aspect of the 2021-22 academic year, which we dearly hope will be set once more in St Mary's Monastery, Kinnoull, after a year of Zoom residential. But mindful of the current situation, half an hour was also given over to preparing an early draft of March's 'Principal's Letter', this being a monthly communication posted to the students on our Moodle site offering encouragement through these difficult days.

After a soup-and-sandwich lunch with my husband and a 'lockdown' walk round the neighbourhood, it was back to the screen at 2pm to meet a new student via Zoom. The candidate, who will begin her three-year formation for ordination in August, comes from the Diocese of Moray, Ross and Caithness, thus increasing the student total from that diocese to four next year. Back-to-back with that came another Zoom meeting, the regular Wednesday afternoon SEI staff meeting. Richard, Linda, Mike and I began as usual with prayer and sharing news of our past week, before getting down to business: deciding who to approach to give the 2022 SEI Lecture, working on the Orientation Week programme and planning a collaborative paper on 'formation' to be given at the upcoming SEI Staff Conference.



The meeting generated a lengthy 'to do' list which I attempted to tackle before saying Evening Prayer. At that juncture I usually log off and 'commute home', but being a Wednesday the screen stayed on till Compline. What better way to end a busy day than by joining the students in *Open Space* to pray this Office. In the silence I added these words: *'Lord, it is night after a long day. What has been done has been done; what has not been done has not been done; let it be.'*

**Revd Canon Anne Tomlinson**

**Three guests** will be welcomed at the March Residential Weekend, held online, from Friday 19 till Sunday 21 March. On Saturday Dr Deborah Lewer will be with us to lead two sessions in the Liturgy practicum entitled '*Art and Liturgy: Challenges and Potential*'. Debbie is Senior Lecturer in History of Art, University of Glasgow, a specialist in modern German art who also works in the field of the intersection between art and religious faith. These interdisciplinary approaches are the focus of her work as an Associate Tutor to the MA in Theology, Imagination and Culture at Sarum College, and of much of her current writing. She is also a broadcaster and a regular speaker in churches and festivals, including Greenbelt.



Aidan Strange will also be with us on Saturday, working with the Leavers as part of the Reflective Practice Level 5 'long' module on Pastoral Care and the Church in which students learn not only about the giving of care but also about taking care of themselves and creating 'Safe Church'. Aidan is the Digital Communications Co-ordinator for the General Synod Office and has worked for the Scottish Episcopal Church since 2017. Working closely with the Director of Communications, Aidan's responsibilities take in website content management, social media content management, video and audio work and provincial online worship.

The Revd Canon Jane Ross will present two sessions on 'Leading a Growing Church' as part of the Mission and Evangelism modules. Jane is Rector of St Ninian's Prestwick (Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway), a congregation which has much to teach us about church growth and outreach into the local community. Students have already benefited from hearing leaders of growing SEC churches speaking as part of this series: the Revd Canon Malcolm Round, (before he retired as) Rector of St Mungo's Balerno, (Diocese of Edinburgh); the Revd Libby Talbot, Associate Rector of St Paul's and St George's (Diocese of Edinburgh); the Revd Dean Norby, Rector of All Saints, Fife (Diocese of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane). The series will close at the May weekend with a presentation from the Very Revd Kelvin Holdsworth, Provost of St Mary's Cathedral (Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway).



In addition to these sessions, students will study Reflective Practice, engage in a Chapter meeting and lead a Bravetalk session. Louise Sanders, second year URC student, will deliver a Bible Study as part of the series of studies on 'Resurrection', and the Small Group 'Iona' will lead three of the eight acts of worship across the weekend, including a Scottish Prayer Book Mattins and a URC Morning Prayer.

**SEI Training Fund.** We are deeply grateful for the very generous gift given last month by the Diocese of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane to the Fund following Dr Tiplady's presentation to its diocesan clergy conference. The Fund supports those who are training fulltime, whether at New College or on the Mixed Mode pathway. Several such students will begin their formation at SEI in August, so continued donations to the Fund are very welcome.

**Diversity and inclusion.** The 2021 Staff Conference which takes place at the beginning of March will feature a paper given by Dr Sanjee Perera, Archbishops' Adviser on Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns. Dr Perera is currently a Research Fellow at the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University, and Research Associate with the Open University School of Law. She took up the Church of England role in January 2021 after having held a number of university posts, most recently Research Fellow with the University of Birmingham, running the *Minority Anglicanism Project*, a major study into the experiences of UK Minority Ethnic (UKME) people in the Church of England.

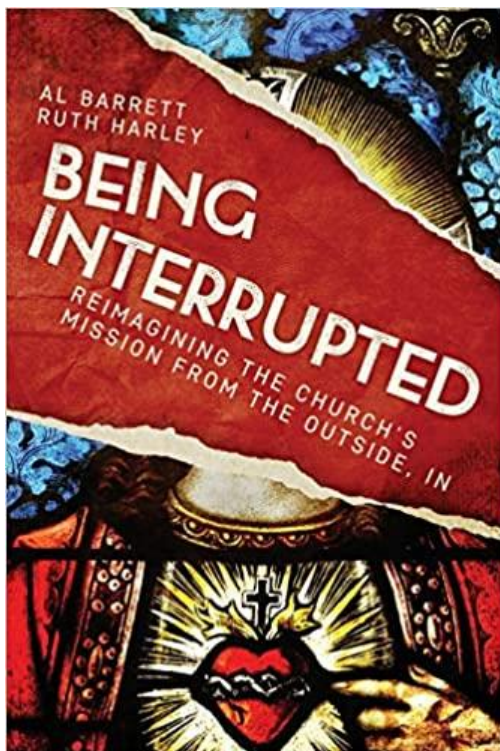


Dr Perera also serves as an adviser on inclusion and diversity to the Church of England's *Setting God's People Free* programme and to the *Common Awards* programme. The paper she will deliver to the SEI staff conference is entitled: *'The pedagogy of theological education: inclusion and critical whiteness in theology.'* This is offered as part of SEI's commitment to interrogating its own practice as regards decolonising the theological curriculum, a process which involves reflecting on the content and delivery of our modules, identifying how they are shaped by a problematic legacy, and finding ways forward that move beyond it.

SEI is also committed to *diversifying* the curriculum by examining our teaching practices and syllabi and asking questions about representation, highlighting those areas where the voices of BAME people, women and others have not been sufficiently represented. This strategy calls for such voices to be integral to and normalised within the curriculum, course-design and delivery, as opposed to being kept on the margins as optional extras or exotic side-notes, or left for extra-curricular exploration. This is not a matter of trying to meet quotas, or ensuring in some mechanical way that the proportions of different voices that we include match the proportions in wider society. It is rather about ensuring that students from a wide variety of backgrounds are able to recognise that voices like theirs belong fully in the theological conversation, and ensuring that all students are drawn into a vibrant and enriching conversation that better reflects the diversity of the worldwide church.

*Common Awards* is hugely supportive of this work. It has developed a 'Diversity and Inclusion Strategy' that aims to work towards creating learning environments that celebrate diverse cultures, theologies, knowledges and identities. It encourages Theological Education Institutions (TEIs) to work together and learn from one another to build training processes that recognise the gifts of all students and staff, whilst celebrating the diversity of God's people both within and outside of the classroom. It aims to advance equality through inclusive practice and pedagogy, and encourages a culture of learning where all students can feel as though they are not only included but that they truly belong within TEIs.

As part of this strategy *Common Awards* is developing e-learning support for TEI staff and students that includes video lectures on 'unconscious bias' training for tutors, administrators and church leaders. It is also developing an e-learning course that will be part of the induction process for TEI staff and students, available on the Hub. The course will raise awareness and help develop understanding of diversity and inclusion. *Common Awards* will also produce podcasts, video interviews and webinars with church leaders and academics highlighting the theological necessity for an inclusive and diverse learning environment. These will cover a range of topics: ethnicity, sexuality, class, gender, and learning issues including mental health.



SEI staff and students will participate in one of these webinars next month on the theme: *'Being Interrupted: Reimagining the Church's Mission from the Outside In'*, when Ruth Harley and Al Barrett will be in conversation with Sanjee Perera about their recently-published book of the same title.

*Being Interrupted* locates the church today – the book, while rooted in a Church of England context, has a challenging message for our own context as well - within the wider contexts of divisions of race, gender, poverty and class in 'the ruins of empire', alongside the marginalization of children and catastrophic ecological breakdown. But as the publisher's description puts it, the authors posit a creative disruption of the status quo, 'from the outside, in'.

Through careful readings of Jesus 'being interrupted' by others, alongside stories from a multicultural estate in Birmingham, they paint a vivid picture of an 'alternative economy' for the Church's life and mission; a journey into the Kingdom of God which begins with transformative encounters with neighbours and strangers at the edges of our churches, our neighbourhoods and our imaginations. The book argues for a radically receptive hospitality towards the unexpected gifts of others and a searching critique of our own socially-conditioned 'obliviousness'.

**Pastors in a Secular Age.** The next session in this series of online seminars for church leaders is entitled: *'Finding our place in history: The Secular Age in Perspective'*. It will be led by the Rev Dr John Carswell, Church of Scotland minister of Cadzow parish in Hamilton, and will take place on Thursday March 18th 3.30pm. Joining details available from the Revd Paul Watson [pastorsinasecularage@gmail.com](mailto:pastorsinasecularage@gmail.com)



This venture, the brainchild of a member of Institute Council, the Revd Paul Watson, Rector of St James the Less, Bishopbriggs, with support from the Revd Dr Richard Tiplady, Director of Mixed Mode Training at SEI, (both shown above trekking in February's snow) is intended to give those at the sharp end of ministry an opportunity for sharing fellowship and wisdom through which to discern God's presence.

The meetings are open to anyone involved in Christian leadership in Scotland. Participants come together for an hour once a month, listen to input on a relevant topic, and spend the rest of the time in discussions in breakout rooms. The organisers, who themselves come from a variety of denominational backgrounds, hope that all who participate might benefit from the richness of experience and relationships as they travel together in facing common opportunities and challenges. 'This is not just about Covid 19,' the organisers say, 'but also the larger context of a secular age. Our prayer is that we will be resourced both personally but also in our ministries to find a way forward and about what God could be saying to each of us in our settings.'

**Flipped seminaries.** In late February SEI staff took part in the first of three 'Consultations on Theological Education', a two-hour webinar on the topic of *'Collaboration between Seminaries and Church-based Theological Education: Opportunities and Challenges'* organised by the Revd Canon Dr Stephen Spencer, Director for TEAC (Theological Education in the Anglican Communion) and Dr Paulo Ueti, (*right*) Assistant Director for Lusophone, Francophone and Spanish speaking regions of the Anglican Communion.



Short inputs were offered by four speakers: Yak-hwee Tan, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Tainan Theological College, Taiwan, gave a paper on 'Social Location and Theological Education'; Bishop Humberto Maiztegui Gonçalves, Diocese of Southern Brazil, spoke of Freireian influences on pedagogy; and Rev Dr Tim Green and Rev Dr Graham Aylett, General Secretaries of the *Increase Association*, an organisation which empowers church-based education across Asia, gave a paper entitled *'Tools to Equip and Empower: Twenty-first Century TEE as a significant Tool for Church-based Theological Education'*. The event was chaired by the Rt Revd Dr Howard Gregory, Primate of the Anglican Church in the Province of the West Indies, with simultaneous translation enabling participants from across the Communion to participate.

The thrust of the consultation concerned ways in which theological colleges and seminaries across the Anglican Communion might redirect their life towards serving the intentional discipleship of the whole people of God. This was following up on a proposal, published in a recent edition of the *Journal of Anglican Studies*, that theological institutions become re-anchored in the life of the local church, having a major role in the encouragement and equipping of those leading 'formation in discipleship' processes. This chimes in turn with the growing consensus within the worldwide Church 'that discipleship is one of the key issues of our times'.

In the *JAS* paper cited above, Dr Spencer argues that that seminaries should become centres that equip their students to become recruiters and equippers of trainers. He encourages 'flipping the seminary' - building on the idea of 'the flipped classroom' - whereby the learning is seen as taking place primarily in the local communities and churches of the diocese, with the classroom becoming the place where this learning is shared, critically reflected upon and enhanced, and then fed back into what takes place outside. *'The college'*, writes Spencer, *'becomes more deliberately a staging post where prospective mentors are equipped and encouraged for their ongoing work in the local communities of their parishes, districts and regions ... focused not on its own life but on the growth of discipleship in the communities, churches and parishes of the areas it serves.'*

This ethos chimes exactly with SEI's formational aims. The course has always been heavily context-based, but this thrust has been intensified in recent years by the advent of the Mixed Mode pathway, a fulltime programme of study based on the interplay of placement experience, theological study, and classroom learning and discussion; one in which 'context is king'. The integration of theory and practice is achieved as theoretical insight feeds into and sustains effective practice, and this practice refines, modifies and reinforces theoretical understanding. The programme assumes a missional priority, intending to equip students to be leaders of their congregations or communities in mission, equipping and empowering others for their lives of discipleship in the world. It was therefore encouraging to be part of a Communion-wide dialogue about this ethos of formation.





**Building a better tomorrow, after Covid.** ‘In a time of ongoing uncertainty, how do we lead?’ writes the Revd Dr Richard Tiplady, SEI’s Director of Mixed Mode Training. ‘Is it all that we can do to tread water or hold the fort? Is it possible to set a direction, to make decisions, and to take God’s people forward, when we don’t know where we’re going or even what might be possible in an uncertain and ever-changing world? Maybe you feel like you’re wandering close to the edge in a bit of a fog, as the above photo shows me doing a few years ago in the Carneddau range of mountains in Snowdonia (yes, I’ve a habit of wandering near the edge of mountains!)?’

This short course is being offered by the Scottish Episcopal Institute as part of its commitment to resourcing the whole church in matters of theology, mission and ministry, and is designed for anyone in a leadership or ministry role in the Scottish Episcopal Church. It will be led by SEI’s Director of Mixed Mode Training, the Revd Dr Richard Tiplady.

There will be 3 sessions, each running from 11am - 12.30pm:

Thursday 22nd April: Start Making Sense (what is going on, and what can you do about it?)

Thursday 6th May: Doing God by Doing Good (an introduction to Responsible Leadership)

Thursday 20th May: Relational Leadership (developing leadership across the whole of your church)

There will be required pre-reading before each session (no more than 2-3 articles or papers per session), and there will be ample time allowed for discussion. As there is pre-reading involved, bookings will close on Thursday 8th April. Please note that you will be engaging with academic leadership texts and you will be expected to have read the papers before each session.

This course is being offered free of charge, with the number of participants limited to 12 to allow plenty of time for discussion and interaction. The course will run on Zoom (what else?).

To register, please go to this Eventbrite [link](#)

*In recent years there has been much theological exploration of the diakonía of the church and of the diaconate; indeed the Winter edition of the SEI Journal contained a paper by John Collins on this subject, plus six further contributions on the subject by authors linked to the SEC. During this*



*time there has also been growth in the number of those being called by God and the Church to serve as Deacons across several traditions. In the SEC, four diaconal candidates were ordained at Michaelmas 2019, another will enter her third year at SEI in the autumn, and yet others are currently in the discernment process. Here the Revd Dr Kathryn Sanderson describes the gathering of Deacons which took place at the end of February.*

**A meeting of Deacons.** A resurgence of interest in the Ministry of the Diaconate is taking place in the Scottish Episcopal Church. In the light of this, the church's Diaconal Working Group invited all the distinctive deacons across the Province to meet on Zoom on 25 February. In the morning, the Revd Norma Higgott, a Deacon and member of the Working Group, held a training session for the four recently ordained deacons: the Revds Sue Ward, Katrina O'Neill, Kathryn Sanderson and Jean Souter. Norma, Chaplain at the Highland Hospice, reflected on the work of 'the deacon as advocate', and Bishop John, Convenor of the Diaconal Working Group, shared his vision of the distinctive diaconate.

In the afternoon, twelve deacons and diaconal candidates gathered with Bishop John, Bishop Ian and the Primus. Bishop John again expressed his desire that this important ministry be enabled to support a College of Deacons. His diocese is a role model of good practice as regards distinctive diaconal ministry; he is being proactive in demonstrating the role of the Deacon within the liturgy, often being accompanied by his Deacon and introducing her to, congregations when making pastoral visits.

The Primus was very supportive of the diaconate's capacity to bring the issues of the world to the church and motivate the worshipping community to look outwards. Bishop Ian referenced deacons as essential to liturgy in expressing who we are in the Eucharist, and of the Deacon's collaborative role with the presiding celebrant therein. Anne Tomlinson, herself a deacon, described how the formation of deacons within the Scottish Episcopal Institute is changing, with the development of a dedicated training pathway currently under consideration.

After brief introductions by all attending, those present at the assembly expressed how pleased they were to be meeting. Discussion illustrated the different ways in which each deacon expresses God's mission of loving, healing and restoring in deeply practical, pastoral and liturgical ways. Deacons are heralds of the Gospel, called to proclaim and make visible God's love in word and deed, seeking out those in need and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom; they bring the concerns of the world to the attention of the church and point people to their own diakonía, sending them out at the Dismissal to continue Christ's work in the world.

There was enthusiastic support from (and for) the Bishops, and for the Working Group's ongoing reappraisal of the Diaconate. Two submissions will shortly be made to the College of Bishops and the Diaconal Working Group respectively regarding ratification of the group's name and the production of an explanatory diaconal booklet for the church at large. The assembled deacons expressed their keen desire to continue meeting and committed themselves to doing so again in two months.

**Revd Dr Kathryn Sanderson**